

Empowerment of parents

by Franco Favilli

The school language People from minority cultures can get to the real citizenship of their new country not just through some formal administrative passages, but through the ability to live their daily life in the new social context without feeling burdened or handicapped by their own culture and habits. This culture and habits don't have to be substituted or changed by the mainstream ones, but, at the same time, they should not represent a shield against or an obstacle to the real integration in the new society.

L2 language learning: a priority for good communication among citizens

Pre-assumption for the social integration and any kind of dialogues is, of course, the sufficient mastering of the natural language of the local society. The acquisition, by the minority parents, of basic knowledge of the local language should, therefore, be the first issue for policy makers in both fields of social sciences and education.

Teaching the natural language of a society, as a L2 language, to a new (ly arrived) citizen requires greater abilities than ordinary language teaching. By the L2 language instruction, the minority people should learn much more than the language: they should acknowledge and understand commonalities and differences between the home culture and the local one, whose language does not represent just a tool for communication in that specific society. To learn a language is to enter a new culture, in the broadest possible sense. This is true in general, but it should be continuously remembered by L2 language teachers when minority people are involved in the learning process.

Linguistic knowledge: necessary but not sufficient condition for good ID dialogue

L2 language learning should be seen by cultural minorities as a tool to communicate, understand and deal with both the other citizens and the new society. The language acquisition should

therefore represent the first step towards a more meaningful knowledge of the social environment and its peculiar basic systems: the administrative system, the economic system, the labor system, the educational system, etc. On each of these areas, parts of the local culture, minorities (in general) and minority parents (in particular) should receive the relevant linguistic instruction (terminology), and adequate information and education (rules, habits, etc.). Whose should be the main concern?

School language understanding: a necessity for parents to communicate to teachers and other parents

Parents of pupils from minority groups meet greater difficulties to communicate about and in the school than other parents for several reasons: apart the language itself, it is their cultural and social (quite often disadvantaged) background and their different views about education and schooling to make it difficult to develop a good intercultural dialogue between them and other parents and teachers. Minority parents need to learn about the language spoken when school and education are concerned: sometimes, words and sentences could hold different meaning when used in the street or in the school.

School language: a set of different linguistic registers and codes The communication about and in the school is affected by several different linguistic registers, with their own peculiar codes: the ability to deal with the societal and cultural linguistic registers being a premise, the understanding of the specific linguistic registers and codes used when school rules and subject matters are concerned is necessary for an effective minority parents / other parents and minority parents / teachers dialogue.

The implementation of educational plans in view of a fair acquisition of the school

language by minority parents is therefore absolutely necessary. Whose is the responsibility to answer this demand? National, regional and local authorities in the field of education should provide, with a general framework for action and, of course, adequate financing. Parents associations and institutions active with minorities should, in turn, draw action plans that could cope with the specific needs of the cultural and social context where their actions are to be implemented. The above action plans should, therefore, not be general, but rooted in ideas originated by and needs arisen from discussions developed within specific minority groups in a given educational area.